E/CONF.105/70/CRP.70

23 June 2017

Original: English

11th United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names
New York, 8 -17 August 2017
Item 10 of the provisional agenda*
Geographical names as culture, heritage and identity (including indigenous, minority and regional language names)

Construction of Toponymic Culture in China

Submitted by China **

* E/CONF.105/1
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Eleventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names
August 8th to 17th, 2017 New York
Provisional Agenda Item 10
Geographical names as culture, heritage and identity

Construction of Toponymic Culture in China

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Summary: In the history of China civilization for more than 5,000 years, Chinese people have created a splendid geographical names culture. During its large-scale urbanization, a large number of old geographical names are rapidly disappearing in rural areas. In order to protect, inherit and carry forward the culture of geographical names, the Chinese government has introduced relevant measures to strengthen the cultural construction of geographical names, to carry out the protection of geographical names as cultural heritage, to strengthen the promotion and strengthen the awareness of protection of geographical names culture. Significant progress has been made in these areas.

During its large-scale urbanization, China is undergoing a process in which the old geographical names are rapidly disappearing in rural areas, while new geographical names are springing up in cities and towns. All sectors of society have attached more importance to the preservation of the toponymic cultural heritage, and called for strengthening the construction of the toponymic culture so as to retain nostalgia. We have made progress in the preservation of the toponymic cultural heritage and in the publicity of the toponymic culture in recent years.

I. Principle of Construction of Toponymic Culture

In 2012, the Ministry of Civil Affairs of China issued *Guidance on Strengthening Construction of Toponymic Culture*, making it clearly that in the construction of toponymic culture, we should take inheritance and development as the main theme, with priorities on preservation and development, inheritance and innovation, communication and exchange, so as to meet people's needs for toponymic culture. The focus of our work will be on the preservation of the toponymic cultural heritage, stimulate the development and prosperity of toponymic culture, and lead the scientific development of the geographical name cause with the construction of toponymic culture. It clearly specified the eight major tasks in the construction of toponymic culture: First, make plans and improve standards in preserving toponymic cultural heritage, and strengthen the identification and preservation of thousand-year-old counties and similar toponymic cultural heritage. Second, strengthen the cultural construction of new geographical names, make and implement plans on geographical names, strengthen management over naming and renaming, and improve the cultural connotation of new geographical names based on inheriting the fine traditional toponymic culture, and promote the innovative development of toponymic culture. Third, further the study of toponymic culture, and carry out surveys, excavation, arrangement and study of the resources of toponymic culture. Fourth, develop products of toponymic culture, compile geographical name books of various kinds, such as maps, records, dictionaries, and annals, provide IT-based service of geographical names, and produce film and television programs or audiovisual works on toponymic culture. Fifth, carry out various activities on toponymic culture that are attractive to the general public, such as exhibitions, article soliciting, and identification of outstanding geographical names. Sixth, push forward the industrial development of toponymic culture, focus on the construction of industrial projects for toponymic culture, develop distinctive products of toponymic culture, such as publications,

audio and video products, navigation and searching software, topical exhibitions, theme parks, festival activities, and theme tourism products, and gradually increase the industrial scale of toponymic culture. Seventh, strengthen the construction of contingent of personnel for toponymic culture. Cultivate talents for toponymic culture, build an energetic team with Chinese characteristics, identify exemplary models and publicize their deeds throughout the society. Eighth, strengthen international exchanges and cooperation in toponymic culture. Push forward the construction of international standardization of geographical names, standardize Roman-letter spelling of geographical names, make a number of high-quality foreign-language publications and audio and video products that promote China's toponymic culture, and facilitate overseas dissemination and exchanges of toponymic culture.

II. Preservation of Toponymic Cultural Heritage

In 2012, the Ministry of Civil Affairs of China formulated *Identification of Toponymic Cultural Heritage* which is the industrial standard, and *Implementation Plan on Preservation of Toponymic Cultural Heritage Nationwide*, which strengthened the identification and preservation of eight types of toponymic cultural heritage, namely, thousand-year-old cities (capitals), thousand-year-old counties, thousand-year-old towns, thousand-year-old villages, geographical names in oracle bone inscriptions and bronze inscriptions, minority names, geographical names of famous mountains and rivers, and important toponymic culture and heritage in modern and contemporary China. In 2012, "China Association on Preservation of Toponymic Cultural Heritage" was founded. The organizations for preservation of toponymic cultural heritage have been established successively in many provinces (autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the central government) nationwide, and a taskforce, whose major task is to preserve toponymic cultural heritage and inherit outstanding toponymic culture, has been built. Take the project of "Ancient County of Thousand Years' History" as an example. China has identified 72 "Ancient Counties of Thousand Years' History" as toponymic cultural heritage since Jingxing County was first identified as "An Ancient County of Thousand Years' History" in 2005 (see the annex for the list).

III. Publicity Activities for Toponymic Culture

The Ministry of Civil Affairs of China has worked with media outlets such as Guangming Daily Press and *Popular Photography*, and carried out diversified publicity activities for toponymic culture in recent years. Such activities include the "Prosper Hand in Hand" nationwide picture solicitation reflecting toponymic culture at provincial boundaries, which received more than 10,000 geographical name pictures; "the Belt and Road" toponymic culture photo exhibition, which collected more than 26,000 pictures; the serial reports featuring "Stories of Geographical Names: History and Nostalgia" in mass media; "Toponymic Culture and Chinese Dream" solicitation of videos (micro-films) about national survey of geographical names, telling stories associated with survey of geographical names and stories about toponymic culture. They collected more than 700 pieces of work, and 66 of which were awarded prizes; and the national toponymic knowledge contest, and nationwide solicitation of theoretical papers on toponymic culture, which resulted in the publishing of a collection of selected theoretical papers on toponymic culture. Toponymic culture products, including documentaries *Geographical Names in China* and *Geographical Names on the Divine Land*, and the multi-media brochure *Chinese Toponymic Culture*, have been made, which has effectively promoted toponymic culture.

From 2015 to 2016, China carried out the solicitation activities featuring "In Search of the Best Geographical Names" and "In Search of the Best Stories about Geographical Names" on the Internet. The public were invited to tell interesting stories, talk about cultural traditions and humanistic spirits associated with the "best" geographical names, or share their point of view about preservation, evolution and changes of geographical names. Requirements of the activities: The "best geographical names" should be those that contain profound historical and cultural traditions and have spiritual connotation of excellent traditional culture, mostly from existing geographical names that are in current use, or those well-known geographical names

that had been used for a long time in history. The solicitation was only limited to the geographical names in China, and should refer to specific places. They mainly refer to the names of natural and geographic entities, names of villages in rural areas, streets and blocks in cities and towns, names of administrative regions such as towns (street committees), cities (counties, districts), and provinces (autonomous regions, or municipalities directly under the central government), and names of human geography entities such as streets and lanes in cities. The articles should focus on the theme "best". The stories about geographical names may include historical allusions, anecdotes of celebrities, folk tales, personal experience and emotional origins. The author may extract the humanistic spirit or cultural traditions from the stories, or offer their point of view on the preservation, evolution and change of the geographical names. The stories about the "best geographical names" may come in the form of text, pictures or short videos. The event "In Search of the Best Geographical Names" lasted for two months, received a total of 1,806 pieces of work, involving some three million readers/viewers. Ten pieces of work were awarded prizes after online voting and expert appraisal. The event "In Search of the Best Stories about Geographical Names" received more than 3,600 articles in two months, and 100 best stories were selected after online voting and expert appraisal. The solicitation campaigns have greatly raised people's awareness of preserving toponymic culture, and aroused people's enthusiasm to pay attention to and protect toponymic culture.